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Reform or Alternatives? Limits and Pressures on Changing the Canadian Mediascape

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In the wake of trade deals and recession, patterns of consolidation have characterized much of Canadian industry over the last decade. Perhaps nowhere else are effects of economic restructuring felt more strongly than in Canada's media industries, and most particularly, in the television news and newspaper businesses. This paper examines some of the recent problems associated with the ongoing concentration of ownership of Canada's newspaper and broadcast media. It considers some of the major impediments to comprehensive regulation controlling concentration and, in the face of these problems, argues that more effort should be focused on developing alternatives to corporate media. Taking a cue from the corporate media, it also considers two models for developing alternative media that build upon economies of scale and scope.

Concentration and the Narrowing of Voices in the News

In Canada, public inquiries such as the 1970 Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media (Davey Commission) and the 1981 Royal Commission on Newspapers (Kent Commission) have helped generate a long-standing concern over the ways in which concentration of ownership tends to narrow the perspectives found in

the news media, and have raised the spectre of owners manipulating news to suit their own corporate or political agendas. Despite these warnings, however, the last decade has seen unprecedented consolidation in Canadian media markets. In the mid-1990s, Conrad Black's Hollinger Corporation gained controlling interest in the Southam chain and then went on a buying spree that gave the company control of almost fifty per cent of daily newspaper circulation in Canada.¹ More recently in 1996, newspaper, broadcasting and telecommunications companies that were once separated by regulation were brought under common ownership.²

In the latest round of consolidation, three major cross-media ownership deals struck during the year 2000 radically altered the Canadian mediascape. CanWest, owner of the Global Television Network, purchased the Southam newspaper group and a fifty per cent share in the *National Post* (one of Canada's two nationally distributed newspapers) from Hollinger Corporation. Today CanWest Global controls one of Canada's two private English-language television networks and approximately thirty percent of the country's daily newspaper circulation.³ In another deal, Canada's largest telecommunications company—Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE Inc.)—purchased the Canadian Television Network (CTV) (the country's largest private television network), and then struck an alliance with Thomson Newspapers (publisher of the largest of Canada's two national newspapers) to form Bell Globe Media. Bell Globe Media now operates Canada's largest private television network and the country's highest circulation national newspaper. Meanwhile, in the province of Québec, Groupe Québécois Inc., one of Canada's largest newspaper groups, purchased Vidéotron, the largest private television network in the province.

These patterns of consolidation in Canada follow models developed in the United States and, as Dwayne Winseck points out, with these deals “The emerging media landscape is being disembedded from local communities and integrated into the dynamics and rhythms of a national and global media economy.”⁴ For the moment, newspapers in Canada remain overwhelmingly Canadian in content, and ownership of Canadian television and newspaper corporations remains largely in Canadian hands. But this may not always be the case. The expanding television universe is increasingly dominated by foreign, mainly American programming, and highly

placed members of industry and government are calling for relaxing foreign ownership rules in Canadian media markets.⁵ Consequently, there are no guarantees that further integration of Canadian media companies into the global mediascape will not occur.

What is driving these changes? Shifting advertising revenues, technological convergence, and competition from new web-based media: all of these forces are seen as pushing media consolidation as companies try to forge new economies of scale and scope that will wring profits from this changing institutional context. Some of the key “synergies”—as the efficiencies gleaned from consolidation are commonly called—sought by these corporations are reduced labour requirements, cross promotion of media products, larger and more flexible advertising markets, the “repurposing” of content created for use in one medium for use in another, and integration of executive and administrative functions.⁶

Given the heavy costs of consolidation it is still not clear whether changing patterns of ownership will bring increased profits to these companies and their shareholders.⁷ However, just as both the Davey and Kent Commissions warned, there is growing evidence that the corporate news media, and particularly newspapers, do not adequately reflect the ideas and perspectives of all citizens.

Amidst escalating concentration of ownership, corporate media across Canada are characterized by organizational cutbacks and a swing to the right of the political spectrum.⁸ The media in Vancouver’s Lower Mainland in British Columbia provides a case in point. As Canada’s third largest media market, CanWest Global and Bell Globe Media overwhelmingly dominate both the newspaper and television news markets there.⁹ Studies by NewsWatch Canada—a media watchdog organization based at Simon Fraser University—indicate that the editorial pages of Vancouver’s daily newspapers are dominated by neo-liberal perspectives and ideas.¹⁰ Additional studies also illustrate a lack of labour reporters and shallow to non-existent coverage of labour issues.¹¹ Organizations representing different ethnic groups and native peoples consistently charge that these media offer inadequate representation of their interests.¹² And there have been several complaints of news manipulation by management at Vancouver’s daily papers, including coverage of the last federal election and recent protests regarding homelessness in the area.¹³

Since the fall of 2001, however, concern over such blind spots in news and editorial perspectives has been overshadowed by charges that the Asper family—controlling shareholders of CanWest—were directly influencing editorial policy at Southam. The controversy began when the chain announced that it would be running weekly editorials written at its Winnipeg head office throughout its papers across the country. Concerns over the propensity of this policy to undermine the independence of local editorial boards quickly escalated into a series of suspensions, resignations and firings, as journalists and columnists apparently found themselves on the wrong side of a much broader editorial policy that dictated the parameters of coverage on a range of topics.¹⁴ For example, in the wake of his work being both heavily edited and withheld from publication, Stephen Kimber, director of the journalism program at King's College in Halifax and former Southam columnist, had this to say after resigning his position in the paper: "You can't say anything that would not be supportive of the government of Israel, that might be supportive of the Palestinians, you can't say anything that would reflect badly on CanWest, and you can't talk about Jean Chretien" (Canada's then Prime Minister).¹⁵

Concern over the degree of control exercised by Southam's owners and senior management over news and editorial was further heightened in January 2003 by an announcement that the company would be centralizing control over national news and features in Winnipeg.¹⁶ Not only does this move present the possibility of more direct control over the news agenda but, through cutting the number of reporters assigned to national news, it also portends a further narrowing of perspectives in news coverage.

Calls for Reform

In the wake of these problems at Southam a number of industry-related organizations including both the Canadian and Québec Associations of Journalists, the two main unions representing journalists—the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) and the Newspaper Guild—as well as groups such as the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, the Canadian Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom, and the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, began publicly calling for a federal inquiry into the

effects of recent consolidation. Among the ideas for reform put forward by these groups are:¹⁷

1. **Impose limits on ownership, particularly cross-media ownership:** Following recommendations made by the Kent Commission, there are calls for limits on cross-media ownership and limits on the number of media outlets one company might own in any one market. These often include calls for current owners to divest holdings to meet proposed limits.¹⁸
2. **Amend the Federal Competition Act:** At present, the regulatory body that oversees the Competition Act—the Competition Bureau—only considers the impacts of media mergers on advertising markets. Reforms in this area would have the Bureau consider the impact of the consolidation on the diversity of free expression of news and ideas, as well as on advertising competition.
3. **Legislate a code of professional practice or code of ethics:** Giving such a code the force of law would help protect journalists and other media workers from undue influence and possible obstructions by owners.
4. **Restructure provincial Press Councils and/or institute a National Media Commission:** In an effort to stave off more coercive forms of regulation, industry sponsored Press Councils were established in some provinces in the wake of both the Davey and Kent Commissions. However, self-regulation is often seen as ineffective in terms of trying to promote fairness and balance in media coverage, and there is no regulatory body at the national level.¹⁹
5. **Right of reply legislation:** Following the lead of the British Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom, there has also been a call for some form of right of reply legislation, so as to provide some form of editorial redress to persons who are misrepresented in the media.

By halting concentration of ownership and helping restore what has often been touted as the firewall between the business and editorial sides of news organizations, reforms like these would help countermand corporate tendencies to interfere with news production. Proposal (1) would help limit the influence of any one owner's political opinions or business practices on the news agenda in any particular jurisdiction. Proposals (2) and (3) would help maintain competing news voices in the marketplace and protect editorial independence and the independence of journalists—two areas that have been deeply undermined by both the Hollinger and CanWest regimes. To some extent, they would also help address concerns that journalists sometimes “self-censor” their work to ensure their stories meet with the expectations of their employers.²⁰ Lastly, proposals (4) and (5) would provide avenues of redress to parties that felt aggrieved by media coverage without resorting to the more formal legal mechanisms. In other words, these reforms would help ensure some diversity in corporate news voices, provide journalists some independence from their corporate employers and provide some checks on the relationship between the media and the public.

Problems for Reform

Despite the concerns of these groups, to date only the Québec provincial government and the Senate Standing Committee on Communication and Culture have shown any interest in pursuing some form of inquiry. Whether the cause will capture the interest of the federal government—the only jurisdiction with the power to address the situation at the national level—remains to be seen. In the interim, however, the project faces both organizational difficulties and limitations on the degree to which it might be effective. These problems signal that reform of the corporate media may not be the entire answer to what ails the system.

As long-time observers of the media reform movement have pointed out, two of the necessary conditions for accomplishing reform are a “conjunction of circumstances [that] creates a will for change” coupled with “intense and sustained public pressure” to help carry reforms through the policy process.²¹ But while recent events have created a “will for change,” public pressure is fragmented at best.

The only independent organization in Canada that is actively engaged in issues of media regulation on a full-time basis is the

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting. This organization sometimes comments on issues surrounding the press, but their primary focus is broadcasting, not print journalism. While there are a number of organizations promoting reform of the print media in Canada, apart from the unions representing journalists, they are small and underfunded.²² Moreover, the groups and individuals advocating reform are divided on the goals of the project. While some unions and advocacy groups are calling for decisive government action on the kinds of reforms outlined above, many journalists, editors, and journalism educators—while supporting an inquiry—are against comprehensive regulation, citing concerns over possible government censorship. As the president of the Canadian Association of Journalists put it, “We are not calling for government control over the editorial process. We agree that politicians have no role in deciding what journalists should publish.”²³ Consequently, there are questions about exactly what kinds of reforms key players in this struggle would support.²⁴

Interventions to the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regarding license renewals for CTV and Global (after the mergers), underscore these observations. Despite concerns which highlight problems of management interference with news production and problems of diversity in news production associated with cross-media ownership as raised by past public inquiries and interveners such as the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting and CEP, there was a large degree of support for the mergers, particularly among industry organizations and journalism professors.²⁵ Even if the problem of organizing a critical mass of concern to help drive the issue forward on the political agenda can be overcome, however, there are several issues facing reform that the current debate around news and editorial meddling by owners tends to mask, issues that indicate limits on the degree of reform that may be accomplished.

The first concerns the degree to which regulators may be able to exact reforms from media corporations. Even as the Kent Commission stated “Freedom of the press is not a property right of owners,” and there may be wide agreement that the media is necessary to the maintenance of democracy and a strong political culture, the media corporations in question are private property, not some kind of public commons.²⁶ Consequently, it is extraordinarily difficult to affect what takes place inside the walls of these

organizations, particularly in the formulation of their product. The sorry history of the attempts of regulators to enforce Canadian content regulations in the broadcasting industry well illustrates the difficulties inherent in attempting to force owners to establish production practices that go directly against their financial interests.²⁷ Already, the CRTC has backed away from attempting to ensure diversity in newspaper and television news production in cross-media companies through enforcing separation of television and newspaper newsrooms. While Québecor agreed to keep completely separate news-production facilities among their converged media properties, both CTV and Global balked at this idea and, in the end, were required to maintain only “independent management and presentation structures,” not independent news gathering facilities. Moreover, some question of the CRTC’s ability to enforce newsroom separation clauses in the face of possible legal challenges still remains.²⁸

As underscored by Robert Martin, Canadian law speaks only to limitations on freedom of expression by the state, not corporate threats.²⁹ Consequently, even if issues of representation are seen as taking precedence over private property rights in theory, making that leap in practice is much more difficult. Indeed, given the questions that convergence raises regarding the rights of owners to impose structural and procedural changes in the newsrooms of their properties, was it coincidence that on the heels of the outcry against Southam’s new centralized editorial policy, one of their January 2002 editorials called for enshrining property rights in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, so as to prevent “the expropriation or undue restriction of property”?³⁰

Another controversial issue focuses on the degree to which more corporate media voices might actually *increase* the range of perspectives found in the press. As has been demonstrated by media scholars, however, patterns of omission in the news media are not simply the product of concentration of ownership or meddling by owners. They can also be traced to the ways in which both news values and journalistic practices tend to foreclose on the range of perspectives included in the news. As Hackett and Zhao point out:

...news values, like the practices of objectivity, typically assume and amplify a presumed consensus around basic social values of liberal capitalism.... While journalism... is

predisposed towards maintaining certain types of social power—technological expertise, patriarchy, private capital—and the liberal state. Oppositional social actors who want to publicly challenge the nature of this consensus will find themselves marginalized and denigrated....³¹

While it would be a mistake to adhere too rigidly to a model of the news media that sees “large corporations and the media working hand in glove to stifle dissent or promote a lethargic public acceptance of the existing distribution of power” as Schudson argues, there is ample evidence of blind spots and patterns of omission in the news offered by the corporate media.³² For instance, NewsWatch Canada has well documented the media’s “apparent unwillingness or inability to adequately cover” issues of labour, social inequality and corporate power, as well as identifying gaps in coverage around issues such as “environmental degradation as a systemic and ongoing problem,” “human rights abuses by Canada’s ‘friends,’” and “gender-related stereotypes.”³³ These findings are echoed by other studies of media representation of issues and events concerning poverty, race, and ethnicity.³⁴

The sources of these problems of representation are complex. In part, they can be directly traced to the fact that, as Hackett and Zhao further put it, the “commercial logic” of corporate media has “editorial consequences” in that organizational resources are oriented toward maximizing advertising revenue.³⁵ As a result, “news and commentary... are shaped by a consumerist orientation” and the drive to capture audiences with particular demographic qualities.³⁶ But these problems are also woven between a set of professional codes and practices, such as journalists’ dependence on official sources to help define the meaning of events and the propensity of journalists to frame events in terms of dominant ideas and stereotypes.³⁷ While pinpointing the causes of specific omissions is an empirical problem, the net result of these practices is that the corporate press tends to provide a stilted and partial perspective on social events and circumstances.

When media reform is approached from this perspective, it raises the issue of whether the kinds of reforms discussed above would adequately address the ways in which news production practices—particularly those set within large, private-profit oriented

corporations—routinely foreclose on the representation of a wide range of ideas and perspectives. At the very least, this work casts doubt on some of the more far-reaching goals of reform in this regard.

Furthermore, although it is often touted as panacea for the problems presented by shrinking forums for public expression, the web holds little promise of solving the problems associated with concentration of ownership in news production, particularly at the local and regional levels. Firstly, as Winseck points out, “more than 80% of the households in the bottom half of the income curve do not have access to the Internet from home, a fact that obviously undercuts the image of the Internet as alternative to conventional media.”³⁸ Secondly, the production of consistent quality content is expensive and the provision of a comprehensive news and information service is generally well beyond the means of small independent web-site operators. Indeed, in Canada, independent operators of “news” Web sites—such as (www.rabble.ca) and (<http://straightgoods.com>) — operate largely as aggregators of information rather than producers. While they may provide sites for bringing together far-flung news stories and editorials that fill in gaps and omissions in corporate news, these organizations are not themselves generating comprehensive alternatives to it.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, cross media companies that count newspapers, broadcast and web-based media among their holdings—like CanWest Global and Bell GlobeMedia—currently control most of the largest web portals and news Web sites in the country. They are also developing business strategies that hinge upon “re-purposing” media content which is generated for their newspapers and broadcast outlets for use in their web-based operations. Consequently, there will probably be very little difference in the content offered by these organizations in the different mediums in which they operate.

By controlling the portals or gateways that lead to the web, large cross-media companies are also developing the technical means to operate their sites as “walled gardens” and keep web-surfers focused on their own news and information sites.³⁹ While these bottom-line motivated strategies may win these companies both display and classified advertisers, they will do nothing to encourage greater diversity in the range of ideas and opinions available in the media.

They may even make it more difficult for people to obtain balanced media coverage.

All this is not to say that it is not worth keeping up the fight for reform and working to redefine communicative rights and responsibilities in favour of the public interest over corporate profits. However, even with the appearance of some radical, galvanizing set of circumstances to help consolidate the movement and push reforms forward, there appears to be no short term or “quick fix” to the problems of representation found in Canada’s corporate news media.

Creating Alternatives

If the current problem facing the media—and particularly the news environment—is a lack of diversity in voices, another way of addressing this concern is to increase the number of alternative media voices or outlets.

In defining the scope of the term “alternative media” it is important to cast the net widely. Otherwise there is a risk of leaving out media products that address issues and concerns that often do not find voice in the corporate media, either because practices of news production work to underplay or frame those issues out of news discourse, or because the demographic profiles of the people they are of interest to fall outside of those sought by advertisers in corporate media.⁴⁰ In other words, the definition should both encompass and encourage social and political diversity.⁴¹ Consequently, “alternative media” are defined here as “independent and/or community-oriented media” with a self-espoused mandate to serve a particular range of social groups and or interests. The key is that the organization has a mandate or purpose foreground over the private profit motive. Ideally, it is operated on a not-for profit or co-operative basis. Among the kinds of organizations that might be included under this definition are the ethnic and labour press, native and environmental publications, and media with a progressive social mandate.

There are many media organizations operating in cities across Canada that meet with this definition. In British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, for instance, there is a wide range of weekly and monthly newspapers and magazines of this type that publish in English and a number of other languages. In the broadcast realm, community cable programs and Co-op Radio provide perspectives that are often left off the corporate-driven news and information agenda. Additionally on

the web, Independent Media Centers are pioneering new ways of creating and delivering news programming. All in all, there are well over fifty of these types of media outlets, most of them print based.⁴² Other major centres, such as Toronto and Montréal, also boast large numbers of these alternatives to the corporate media.

For the most part, however, because of their small size and reach, these media outlets lack economic stability. They have few economies of scale, and workers often work for little or no pay. The size and demographics of their audiences are often unknown, making advertising and subscription sales difficult. Economic uncertainty also creates irregular publication dates and poor distribution. Moreover, there is little in the way of government support to help promote the development of these kinds of organizations and some of the infrastructure that did exist has been eroded over the last decade.⁴³

Building Critical Mass: Economies of Scale and Scope

For the most part, independent and community media have developed out of a concern for the expression of a particular set of ideas and values, and consideration of a business model has generally taken a back seat to this goal. However, developing sound business models and strategies is essential if these media are going to provide real alternatives to the corporate press. Taking a cue from the corporate sector, one way to begin to overcome some of the economic difficulties these media face is to create associations or strategic partnerships that, in turn, create synergies in production and distribution. Two organizations that have exhibited remarkable success in doing just that are described below.

Independent Press Association

Founded on the fringes of the 1996 Media and Democracy Congress, the Independent Press Association (IPA) is a non-profit organization that helps small, generally progressive magazine and newspaper publishers develop and build their operations.⁴⁴ The organization has twenty-three full-time employees in offices in San Francisco and New York and over four hundred member publications which are based primarily in the United States. The IPA has revenue of over \$5 million and an operating budget of \$2 million and, while about half of

the operating budget is still dependent on grants, the organization is increasingly able to cover its costs through revenues it generates itself. Among the services the IPA offers its members are:

- **Technical and Consulting Services:** A range of consulting services to help improve content and production, as well as business advice.
 - **Revolving Loan Fund:** Lack of access to capital can be a key obstacle to developing a wider readership. To meet this problem, the IPA administers loans of up to \$50,000 to help promote circulation, increase advertising sales, improve newsstand distribution, or upgrade infrastructure. Since 1998, the fund has provided loans totaling \$550,000.
 - **New Voices in Independent Publishing:** This program promotes the development of racially diverse voices in the independent press through scholarship opportunities, seminars and workshops on hiring practices and employment equity, and facilitating the development and circulation of job opportunities.
 - **Big Top Distribution Services:** This is a distribution service that promotes national distribution for over seventy IPA members. Big Top carries magazines with newsstand circulation of less than 1,000 to over 80,000 copies. As well as distribution, they also offer a range of services including billing, collections, and sales analysis.
 - **Campus Alternative Journalism Project:** This is a campus outreach program that connects student papers to the larger network of the independent press. The project provides training, mentorship, and networking opportunities for youth and student journalists involved in activist work.
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- **Library Initiative:** This initiative is designed to increase library subscriptions of IPA members as well as to raise the profile of independent media.
- **IPA New York:** This office operates a number of innovative programs for bolstering the independent press in that city, including an advertising pool among the ethnic and independent press.
- **Lobby:** The IPA has been particularly active in working to keep postal rates down.

While the long-term success of the IPA model is based upon its ability to build a large enough membership to support its own operations, it offers an excellent example of the kinds of services that might be offered to help develop business infrastructure and harness economies of scale and scope among the operators of independent and community media.

Grand Rapids Community Media Center

The Community Media Center in Grand Rapids Michigan (GRCMC) offers another model, this one based on electronic media.⁴⁵ The Center is located on the second floor of a public library building in downtown Grand Rapids. It operates as a co-operative and houses a community radio station, a public access television station, a non-profit Internet services company, and a policy organization. A national archive for community media is under development. Each of these affiliates contributes a portion of its income to the Center which manages the facility. As a whole, the organization has an annual budget of \$1.2 million and has twenty full-time employees. In exchange for conducting a capital campaign that raised \$1.5 million for renovating the property, the city granted the Center a twenty-year rent moratorium. Each of the Center's operating units is briefly described below.

- **Grand Rapids Community Media Center (GRCMC):** As well as operating the facility, Center's staff provides secretarial and management services to the affiliates as well as community

outreach and consulting services to non-governmental organizations and other non-profits.

- **WYCE 88.1 FM:** This is a 1000-watt community radio station with over eighty programmers and thirty-five hundred local donors. Programming is in six languages and fifty per cent of programmers represent local racial and ethnic minorities. Half of the station's funding is derived from on air pledge drives, twenty-five per cent from concerts, and twenty-five per cent from sponsorships.
- **Grand Rapids Public Access Channel (GRTV):** GRTV operates two access television channels, one that serves the local area and another that is shared among the region's four access channels. It has a mobile media lab and can broadcast live from more than two dozen sites around the city.
- **GrandNet Services:** This affiliate provides internet services to non-profit organizations, including web hosting, web site design and services, production work, e-mail lists, and dedicated web access. They also operate a teaching lab and are developing repurposing strategies for electronic media.
- **Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID):** Among the projects the Institute is involved in are local media monitoring, media literacy and education workshops, and helping non-profits develop media relations and strategies.

As Dirk Koning, the executive director of the Center points out, the cooperative model is yielding an ever-evolving set of synergies in terms of both exploiting operational efficiencies—such as sharing equipment, staff, and engineering and management services—as well as mounting new projects and initiatives.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Reform of the corporate media is an important and necessary project—a project that lies at the heart of safeguarding democracy.⁴⁷ Despite the warnings of two public inquiries, however, concentration

of ownership and its attendant problems continue to escalate in Canada, and developing a resistance movement strong enough to inspire government to impose reforms upon the corporate press remains an elusive goal. Moreover, even if commonly called for reforms are instituted, there is some question of the degree to which they will alleviate the lack of diversity of perspectives in the corporate media.

The relatively fragmented character of the reform movement points to the need for more formal mechanisms of organization, as well as the importance of greater funding commitments on the part of some of its better heeled proponents. At its centre, the project requires clear goals around which a campaign (or campaigns) might be organized and coalitions built.⁴⁸ Increasing the number and scope of organizations that support reform is also crucial, and developing a clear agenda is an important step in that direction.⁴⁹

Yet given the obstacles facing media reform, working to bolster independent and community media is also an important and pressing project, as well as perhaps the only way to guarantee that a wide range of perspectives are available through public communication. While this project has barely begun, some steps that might be taken in this direction are:

- Develop a comprehensive directory of independent and community media in Canada complete with publishing and circulation data that can be used by media operators to locate possible strategic partners and potential advertisers and customers to find these media outlets.
- Research what the operators of these media perceive to be their needs in terms of building economic infrastructure, both in terms of direct aid and policy development.
- Hold meetings between social justice groups, other NGO's, and alternative media to explore what synergies might be had in terms of, on one hand, these media helping develop publics and public awareness for these groups and their causes and, on the other hand, these groups helping develop circulation and readership for these publications.

- Build local, regional, and national associations or cooperatives to undertake efforts and activities such as those that the IPA undertakes, as well as programs to create and support local non-profit and/or cooperative community media centres.
- Establish tax incentives and production funds to encourage investment in independent and community media.
- Encourage government—one of the largest advertisers in the country—to use independent and community media for their information campaigns.

As Dorothy Kidd emphasizes, “the role of alternative media as unofficial opposition to mainstream media has been crucial to the extension of public discussion and debate about a wide range of concerns and issues.”⁵⁰ And in the face of escalating concentration of ownership and shrinking corporate media voices, it would appear that creating infrastructure to help these organizations build and expand this role is not only increasingly important to maintaining vibrant and diverse avenues of public communication, but perhaps also to maintaining democracy itself.

Notes

¹ John Miller. *Yesterday's News: Why Canada's Daily Newspapers are Failing Us*. (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 1998), p. 61.

² Canada. Information Highway Advisory Council. (IHAC) *Preparing Canada for a Digital World* (Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1997), pp. 10-12.

³ Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom (CPBF), “Ownership Tables,” (cited 5 March 2003) Available from (<http://www.presscampaign.org>).

⁴ Dwayne Winseck, "Lost in Cyberspace." *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication*, Paul Attallah and Leslie Regan Shade (eds.) (Scarborough, Ontario: Thomson Nelson, 2002), p. 328.

⁵ Simon Tuck. "CanWest urges removal of ownership limits." *Globe and Mail* (28 February 2003), p. B4.

⁶ See Canada. Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission. (CRTC) Decision 2001-457. (2 August 2001) and Canada. Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission. (CRTC) Decision 2001-458. (2 August 2001.). cf. Janet McFarland and Keith Damsell. "CanWest unveils management shuffle" *Globe and Mail* (29 January 2003): B3 and Keith Damsell "CanWest set to launch news hub." *Globe and Mail* (20 January 2003), p. B21.

⁷ Fabrice Taylor. "Shareholders can win if CanWest gets debt relief." *Globe and Mail*. (23 January 2003), p. B17.

⁸ See David Taras. *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media*. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001) and Miller, 1998.

⁹ Jennifer Chen and Gary Graves, "Media Ownership in Canada" Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. CBC News Online. (cited 5 February 2002). Available from (<http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/mediaownership.html>)

¹⁰ Robert Hackett, "Media Study Shows imbalance of Political Opinion in Vancouver's Two Largest Newspapers." CPBF: (August 2, 2000) (cited 16 February 2003) Available from (http://presscampaign.org/articles_10.html) and Robert Hackett et al., *The Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada's Press*. (Ottawa/Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: Garamond, 2000).

¹¹ Hackett et al., pp. 193-197.

¹² Institute for Media, Policy and Democratic Society. (IMPACS). "Report on the Proceedings of the November 2000 Roundtable Consultation between Ethnocultural Community Groups and Mainstream Media." (Vancouver: November, 2000).

¹³ Communication, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP), "Media concentration concerns a majority of Vancouver residents, CEP opinion survey shows." (Vancouver: 23 February 2001) and Allen Gar, "NPA keeps Danny the Mute in tent." *Vancouver Courier* (5 September 2001) (cited 16

February 2003) Available from
(<http://www.vancourier.com/094202/opinion/094202op1.html>).

¹⁴ The Montréal Newspaper Guild has kept an archive of the relevant press clippings in this regard at (www.Montréalnewspaperguild.com). (Cited Feb. 15 2003). cf. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. "NOT IN THE NEWSROOM! CanWest Global. Chain Editorials and Freedom of Expression in Canada." (April, 2002).

¹⁵ In interview with Tony Jones of the Australian Broadcast Commission . Broadcast: 21/5/2002. (Cited 3/6/2002) Available from (<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/s560764.htm>).

¹⁶ Damsell, 2003.

¹⁷ CEP, "Journalistic Standards in Monopolized Media. (Vancouver: February 2002); CJFE, 2002; Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom. (CPBF.) "Confronting the Problem of Media Ownership Concentration in Canada." (online) (cited 11 January 2003) Available from (<http://www.presscampaign.org>).

¹⁸ However, a recent government report concludes that such divestiture is "not conceivable." See Canada, Department of Heritage. "Media Studies: Concentration of Ownership in the Media Part II", p. 12.

¹⁹ Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao. *Sustaining Democracy: Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998), pp. 91-92.

²⁰ Hackett et al., p. 88.

²¹ Tom Kent, "The Times and Significance of the Kent Commission" in *Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada* (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992).38-39; and Canada. Dept. of Heritage, p. 12.

²² For example, see Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom at (<http://www.presscampaign.org>).

²³ Robert Cribb, "Journalists' association wants diversity of opinions protected in wake of CanWest's editorial decisions." [*Vancouver Sun*, 7 February 2002], p. A-19.

²⁴ cf. Anthony Germaine, "Exploring the issue of Russell Mills Firing." *Policy Options*, (October 2002) 17- 19 and Russell Mills, "Under the Asper thumb." (*Globe and Mail*, 19 June 2002), p. A 17.

²⁵ CRTC Decisions 2001-457 and 2001-458 offer a brief overview of these interventions and transcripts of them are available from (www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/process/2001/Apr17.htm).

²⁶ Kent Commission: 1.

²⁷ Robert Babe, *Canadian Television Broadcasting Structure. Performance and Regulation*. (Hull, Québec: Minister of Supply and Services, 1979), pp. 141-156.

²⁸ Chris Hope, "Chasing Asper: The CRTC's Changing Stance on Convergence through the Evolution of the Canadian Media Industry." (Friends of Canadian Broadcasting: 2002) 13, and Antonia Zerbesias, "Networks Balk at New Rules for Licenses." (*Toronto Star*, 26 April 2001).

²⁹ Robert Martin, *Media Law* (Concord, Ontario: Irwin law, 1997), p. 5.

³⁰ *Vancouver (British Columbia) Sun*, (10 January 2002), p. A 12.

³¹ Hackett and Zhao, 1998, pp. 149-105.

³² Michael Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production Revisited (Again)," *Mass Media and Society*. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 180.

³³ Hackett et al., 2000, p. 166.

³⁴ IMPACS, 2000; Swanson, Jean. *Poor Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion* (Toronto: Between the lines Press, 2001): 90-105.

³⁵ Hackett and Zhao, p. 65.

³⁶ Robert Hackett, Richard Pinet and Myles Ruggles. "From Audience Commodity to Audience Community: Mass Media in B.C." *Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada*, (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992), p. 14.

³⁷ cf. Schudson, 2000; M. Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.); Todd Gitlin. *The Whole World is Watching*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.); H.J. Gans. *Deciding What's News*. (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

³⁸ Winseck, p. 330.

³⁹ Jeffrey A. Chester, "Web behind Walls" *Technology Review*, (June 2001) (cited 31 January 2003). Available from (<http://www.technologyreview.com/articles/reviews0601.asp>).

⁴⁰ Jacob Kokila, "Canada's ethnic newspapers provide critical multicultural perspective." *CJFE Reporter* Issue 1, (2001), p. 3.

⁴¹ In this regard, there is a danger in definitions that focus solely on political criteria, particularly as may tend to discount ethnic media. See for instance, Michael Albert. "What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?" who sees alternative media as necessarily subversive (online) (cited 12 November 2002.), available from (<http://www.zmag.org/whatmakesalti.htm>), or John Downing. *Radical Media*. (Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. ix-xi, who defines such media as "radical" or generally counter-hegemonic.

⁴² Author's survey, 8/5/2002.

⁴³ For instance, in 1997 the CRTC ended mandatory funding of community television by cable companies.

⁴⁴ cf. (www.indypress.org), accessed on 17/2/03.

⁴⁵ cf. (<http://www.grcmc.net>).

⁴⁶ Interview with author 23 February 2003.

⁴⁷ Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols. *Our Media, Not Theirs*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), pp. 70-73.

⁴⁸ Robert Hackett and Megan Adam, "Is Media Democratization a Social Movement?" *Peace Review* 11:1 (1999), pp. 125-131.

⁴⁹ McChesney and Nichols, pp. 127-140.

⁵⁰ Kidd, Dorothy, "The Value of the Alternative Media," *Peace Review* 11:1, (1999), pp. 113-119.

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